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SUBJECT: Did Russia and Georgia both lose the war?

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11. (SBU) Summary: Official Russia hailed the EU's report on the August 2008 Georgia war, considering the core conclusion to be that Georgia started the armed hostilities. Duma and Federation Council officials reacted similarly, claiming the report called Russia's actions "legitimate." Analysts recognized that both Georgia and Russia were criticized, with Kommersant noting that the report rejected Moscow's justification for its armed interference, and Vedomosti adding that the report cited Russia for setting up the prerequisites for the war. On politcom.ru, Sergey Markedonov praised the report for destroying the "black and white" depiction of the war, and ending Russia's "demonization." End Summary.

Official Russia

12. (SBU) In public statements, Russian officials unanimously welcomed the EU's Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, released on September 30. President Medvedev's press-secretary Natalya Timakova said that Russia hailed the conclusion on who launched the first attack, while the MFA on its website echoed statements to the press by DFM Karasin that the "core conclusion" of the report was the current leadership of Georgia "unleashed the aggression against South Ossetia," and noted that the report named the countries that had armed and trained the Georgian army. However, the MFA claimed that the report contained a number of ambiguities, reflecting the "politicized approach of many EU countries." In particular, the MFA rejected the conclusion that Russia had made a disproportionate use of force.

13. (SBU) In public remarks, Russian Ambassador to the EU Vladimir Chizhov praised the conclusion that Georgia had started the conflict, while Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitriy Rogozin noted that, had Russia been accused of that aggression, a broad discussion would have started in Brussels.

14. (SBU) Independent-minded Deputy Russian Ombudsman Ambassador Georgiy Kunadze, whose last name betrays his Georgian ethnicity, was among the most skeptical commentators. Publicly stating that the report "meant nothing," he charged Europe wanted Russia to renounce its recognition of the breakaway republics. However, "Russian citizenship" of South Ossetians could not be considered as legitimate. He called on Russia to compromise with Europe, as the Georgian problem could only be resolved through cooperation.

Duma and Federation Council

15. (SBU) In public remarks, Chairman of the State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Konstantin Kosachev called the report the first to qualify Georgia's actions as "unsanctioned aggression," while calling Russia's "legitimate." He was supported by Federation Council Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman colleague Mikhail Margelov, who praised Brussels' "thorough and rational approach." Deputy Chairman of the State Duma CIS Committee Konstantin Zatulin accused anti-Russian forces of "trying to condemn Russia," while Head of State Duma LDPR Faction Igor Lebedev publicly called the report "Europe's cowardly effort not to spoil relations with either the U.S. or Russia."

Analysts

16. (SBU) Stating that neither Moscow nor Tbilisi were able to convince Europe they were right in August 2008, Kommersant newspaper acknowledged that the report contained a number of conclusions unpleasant for both Georgia and Russia. Noting that the report accused Russia of launching aggressive action against a sovereign state and encouraging ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia, Kommersant pointed out that the report rejected all the points Moscow had made to justify its armed interference. The paper continued to say that the real question should be what to do next, as Georgian IDPs still had no hope of returning to their homes, no one fully understood what is going on in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russian assistance money disappeared while destruction remained, and Russia refused to talk about it.

17. (SBU) Vedomosti newspaper agreed that the report's main conclusion was that Georgia fired the first shot, but added that the report cited Russia for setting up the prerequisites for the war. Vyacheslav Nikonov, president of the Politika foundation and a

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member of the Russian Public Chamber, told the press that the report's conclusions showed the number of Saakashvili supporters in the EU had "dropped dramatically," crowing that Europe had admitted that Tbilisi had the "biggest minus" by starting the armed conflict.

18. (SBU) Sergey Markedonov from the Institute for Political and Military Analysis thought in an article on politcom.ru that official Moscow was not satisfied that the report did not pick up Russia's political vocabulary such as "Georgian aggression," or "genocide of Ossetians." The main merits of the commission's report, he argued, were the destruction of the "black and white" depiction of the war, and the end of Russia's "demonization."

BEYRLE